

The Milk Behind the Cheese

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Have you ever wondered the meaning behind mozzarella di bufala and pecorino? Or why one cheese is tangier than another? Well, while there are many different factors that contribute to the flavors and textures of formaggi, there is one element in particular that gives a cheese its distinct characteristics: the type of milk!

Just like different grape varieties produce different tasting wines, different types of animal milk produce different tasting cheeses. What type of milk is in your cheese and how does it affect the flavor? Let's explore!

A guide to the different types of milk and the cheeses they produce

COW MILK

Versatile and earthy, cow milk is the most common milk used to produce cheese throughout the



world. The flavor of cow milk depends heavily on the cow's diet, as well as the cow breed! Cows that munch on grass throughout their life will produce grassier tasting milk and cheeses. Throughout Italy, cow's milk is used to produce a wide variety of cheeses, from the nutty Parmigiano Reggiano DOP to the piquant provolone. In the U.S., we all know the strong taste of cow's milk cheddar!

STAFF PICKS: Parmigiano Reggiano DOP Cravero Vacche Rosse, Grana Padano DOP

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: The versatility of cow milk cheeses means that they can be used in a variety of ways! When in doubt, pair the cheese according to the tradition of its region. Parmigiano Reggiano DOP and Grana Padano DOP pair well with a light, bubbly wines such as Prosecco or Lambrusco which help cleanse the palate.

BUFFALO MILK

Luscious and sweet, buffalo milk contains twice as much fat than cow milk. This pearly white latte comes from water buffalos, a common species in Italy that is different from than the bison buffalo native to the United States. Creamy with a delicate tang, water buffalo milk is commonly used to make Mozzarella di Bufala DOP and burrata cheese in southern Italy.

STAFF PICKS: Quadrello di Bufala, Mozzarella di Bufala DOP

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: Serve soft buffalo milk cheeses with extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkle sea salt over toasted bread. Pair it with a mineral, floral white wine or a light and fruity red.

SHEEP MILK

Significantly higher in fat and protein than cow milk, sheep milk boasts a range of flavors from opulent and tangy to buttery and nutty. The most common sheep milk cheeses from Italy include ricotta and a variety of aged pecorino cheeses (pecorino means "little sheep" in Italian).

STAFF PICKS: Pecorino Sardo, Pecorino Romano

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: Spread fresh sheep milk cheese on toasted crostini and pair with a refreshing, crisp white wine. For aged, saltier cheeses, grate over pasta or serve alone, paired with a dark, fruity red wine.

GOAT MILK

Thanks to a diet of thorny grasses and brambles, goats produce milk with grassy, bright flavors and a signature tang. In Italy, caprino cheese gets its name from capra, or "goat," and can be made into caprino fresco, fresh goat milk cheese, or caprino stagionato, aged goat milk cheese.

STAFF PICKS: Cacciotta, Sheep milk ricotta, Caprino Fresco

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: Use for stuffing meats and vegetables, or spreading on freshly sliced bread. Goat milk cheeses pair wonderfully with fruit and sweet jams, and zippy, young white wines.

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE MILK IN YOUR CHEESE

When selecting Italian cheeses, the name almost always indicates what type of milk the cheese is made with. Learn how to spot these words when selecting cheeses!



Bufala = buffalo milk (ex. Mozzarella di Bufala)

Pecorino = sheep milk (ex. Pecorino Romano)

Caprino = goat milk (ex. Caprino Fresco)

*If the name does not include any other words above, it is likely a cow milk cheese or a blend of different kinds of milk.

Keep in mind that it's not only the animal itself that makes the difference but also where the animal lived, how it was raised, what it ate during its life, and how the cheese artisan decided to create their cheese. Think about it: there are hundreds of different types of cow milk cheeses, each of them offering distinctly unique flavor profiles. For example, Parmigiano Reggiano DOP is only produced in certain areas of Italy with certain cows that eat a certain diet. If you tried to make a cheese in the style of Parmigiano Reggiano in another place, it might be a really delicious cheese, but it wouldn't taste exactly the same as the real Parmigiano Reggiano DOP.

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